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ABSTRACT

The relationship of literacy to work should be considered in terms of the political and economic conditions that structure the experiences of the working and non-working poor with respect to education and work. Research shows welfare-to-work programs constitute behavioral solutions to what are structural economic problems; literacy alone cannot easily or often overcome effects of class, race, and gender on access to education and job opportunities; part of the difference in training and career paths lies in social networks accessible to individuals of different class and race status; and the problem of welfare dependency is a labor market structure problem. The policy assumption that individuals need education and training to prepare for the existing job market, from which most funding proceeds, leaves out the class, race, and gender dynamics of the labor market and questions about job availability, pay, type of employment, and hiree ability to afford health and child care. A liberating vision for education of the poor and unemployed means acknowledging the dissonance between employers' and workers' interests, funding objectives and learners' purposes, and education as a human right and as a form of job training; providing the intellectual tools to have choices about survival and success strategies and to choose and act on political positions; and building alliances with organizations working to create conditions to challenge inequalities in access to education and jobs. (Contains 39 references.) (YLB)

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POLITICS, POLICY, PRACTICE AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY: ADULT EDUCATION IN AN ERA OF WELFARE REFORM

by

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In the popular discourse of workplace literacy and skill requirements, we seem to tell just a few stories. We are able to tell sad stories of people who live impoverished lives and cause others to suffer because they don't know how to read and write. Or we are able to tell happy, Horatio Alger-type stories of people who prosper and contribute to the common good because they have persevered and become literate. We have our dominant myths, our story grammars, if you will, of success and work, from which it is hard to break free. Other stories, with their alternate viewpoints, different voices and other realities, can help us amend, qualify, and fundamentally challenge the popular discourse of literacy and work (Hull, 1997:28-29).

To survive in the political and popular world of literacy education seems to have meant a willingness to accept, not challenge, assumptions. However, renewal and the long-term survival of the field rest not with acceptance, but with its exact opposite. They will depend on analysis, questioning, risk taking, and above all, the faith that literacy education is worth doing (Quigley, 1997:32).

Introduction

In this paper, following the examples set by Quigley and Hull, I try to challenge the prevailing discourse of policy with respect to literacy, poverty, work and welfare reform. In a previous article, I reviewed data on the effectiveness of education and training policies with respect to employment of both welfare recipients and displaced workers (1996) and more recently I completed a research review of studies on adult education and welfare to work initiatives for the National Institute for Literacy (1998). This paper does not present extensive data on either of these topics, but rather reflects critically on what that data means for our field. Those interested in reviewing the data are referred to the two prior publications.

Prevailing policy implies that because literacy level is clearly related to employment, the proper role for adult educators vis-à-vis learners on public assistance is to deliver them job ready and to place them in jobs as well. Instead, we know and research shows that many more factors, beyond the literacy level of applicants, are involved in the transition from public assistance to employment. These factors include the state of the local labor market, the racial and gender

segmentation that characterize employment in the United States, and access to social networks that can provide entry to employment (Holzer, 1996; Newman, 1995; Lafer, 1992; Schneider, 1997). Moreover, for many, the path to work and related education is not smooth, quick or linear (Pavetti, 1993; Herr and Halpern, 1991), and involves needs and circumstances not likely to be addressed by short term job readiness or work experience programs mandated by current policy.

As the research referenced above shows, both socio-economic systemic factors—such as what kinds of jobs are available to whom and individual ones—such as substance abuse, and mental and physical health issues—mediate the relationship between literacy level and employment success. To complicate matters further, anthropological studies of literacy in workplaces and training programs indicate that our understanding of the relationship between literacy and the kind of reading, writing and math skills actually used at work is seriously flawed (Hull, 1997). And though much of the rhetoric of welfare to work programming implies that even entry level employment is synonymous with self-sufficiency, adequate income for single mothers and their families may require not only employment, but the kind of jobs available to those with post-secondary education (Bos, 1996). All of this data calls into question the often simplistic association between raising literacy levels and individual success that underlies adult education policy and practice in an era of welfare reform. One clear example of the latter is that, under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 that will in future subsume adult education funding, the criteria for success of programs includes not only indicators of progress in literacy and English language skills but job placement and promotion.

And yet, education *is* important to individuals' struggle for economic self-sufficiency, and we have devoted our professional lives to providing education for adults whose motivation for seeking it is often a desire for a job or career advancement. Current policy often pits the dedicated practitioner in us against the educator who understands the errors of the facile equation of have literacy, will work. Those who see part of their job as helping people to, in Friere=s words, read the world as well as the word, or to write for self-expression as well as to fill out an application, feel uncomfortably pushed in the direction of becoming trainers, rather than educators (Friere & Macedo, 1987).

As a literacy researcher and writer, my discomfort stems from the stories we have to tell to keep literacy funded and worthy in the public eye. This occurs when I write proposals, reports, and papers that require accepting assumptions that govern prevailing adult education policy and funding. When I do so, I try to find connecting points between these imperatives and my own beliefs and understanding of adult education, its goals, and its practice. I might, for example,

argue that contextualized literacy instruction aiming at work readiness and workplace competency is in line with theory about how adults learn best when education is provided in a meaningful framework. I might further argue that educating low literate adults benefits everyone: the individuals themselves, employers, society, children, etc. It's not that these things are false, but that they are only part of the much more complicated story of literacy and its relation to work, and by extension to poverty and welfare reform. Increasingly, it is the complications, the alternative versions of stories, and other perspectives on literacy and its purposes that are silenced. I worry about the impact of this silence on our field, our practice, and the learners in our programs. Isn't literacy instruction, after all, about breaking silence? If we, among the most literate in our society, are so silenced, how can we model the potential of literacy to give voice—one of the four goals articulated by learners nationwide in the survey done by Equipped for the Future (Stein, 1997)?

Contextualizing Literacy, Poverty and Welfare Reform

In the kind of writing we do for funders and formal reports, the perspective is necessarily a limited one. Literacy and its relation to work are considered within a narrow framework that excludes the voices of learners and most educators. I want to now consider this relationship in terms of the political and economic conditions that structure the experiences of the working and non-working poor with respect to education and work, as this experience is rendered in the research of anthropologists. While I believe it is important to set the parameters of the discussion in this way, my purpose in doing so is to inform a discussion of policy, practice and activism among adult educators, one that explores and changes our silence around the structural conditions governing access to work and to education.

A prevailing assumption of welfare reform, strongly suggested by the legislation's title: Personal Responsibility Act, is that poverty and joblessness are caused by a failure of will, by the behavior of individuals, as influenced by their cultural beliefs. A second assumption, and one that guides education and training policy, is that some individuals are unemployed because they lack the literacy and skills necessary for available jobs. In her study of education and training for welfare recipients done in the early 90s, Churchill made the distinction between such assumptions about welfare, made by "citizen-taxpayers" and politicians, and the views of women on welfare themselves. Education and training policies for these women were based on the views of others, Churchill notes, and the welfare to work programs created in response to these policies were spectacularly unsuccessful. Such programs, she argues, constitute behavioral solutions to what

are structural economic problems. For example, the false behaviorist assumption that the majority of people receiving public assistance don't work because they lack incentive masks the fact that most people circulate between low paying, unstable jobs and welfare. This fact has more to do with the nature of the entry level job market, and the lack of national child care and health care systems, than with attitudes and behavior toward work (1995: 10, 26).

Both Hull (1997) and Schultz (1997) raise questions about the "skills gap", or the notion that employers cannot find workers who have the skills necessary for available jobs. Hull situates her position as follows:

> As I question the popular discourse, I will not be claiming that there is no need to worry about literacy, or that there is not a problem with helping people to live up to their potential, or that the nature of work and the literacies associated with it are not . . changing radically. However, I will be questioning the assumptions that seem to underlie popular beliefs about literacy, work and learning. . . . I will argue that the popular discourse of workplace literacy tends to underestimate and devalue human potential and mis-characterize literacy as a curative for problems that literacy alone cannot solve (11).

Literacy by itself cannot, as research shows, easily or often overcome the effects of class, race and gender on access to both education and job opportunities. As Billie Holiday once sang, "Them that got shall get, them that's not shall lose, so the Bible says, and it still is news." Although such news is not often reported in the mainstream media, a recent study by Schneider of the effectiveness of job training and education credentials for moving individuals from welfare to work adds meat to the true bones of Holiday's words. The study was conducted with the cooperation of the Philadelphia Private Industry Council and was a project of the Institute for the Study of Civic Values (1997a). Data was collected from 338 individuals currently enrolled in training programs and community college. Only 6% of the study population had never been on welfare and 83% were receiving public assistance at the time of the study (1997a, p. 1, 4). Schneider found four distinct patterns of work experience among participants in the study. One group had limited or no work experience, and comprised 23% of the population studied (13% who had never had a job and 10% who had only had one job for less than one year). A second group, low skill workers, had no high school diploma or limited skills, and moved from low skill job to low skill job. A third group were displaced workers, between 60 and 75% of whom had held their first job five years or more. Finally, there were migrants (mostly Puerto Rican citizens, and

refugees), some of whom were highly educated and skilled and needed to learn the language and acquire experience in the US labor market, and others who were low skilled and had limited education (1997a, p. 32-34). These patterns were found to hold among a larger sample of 800 Philadelphians in seven interrelated studies between 1992 and 1996 (1997b, p. 3-4).

Schneider found that the use and outcomes of training programs varied by work experience, education, and race. Not surprisingly, those without high school diplomas often attended more than one training program and "appeared to be on a training track which led nowhere." People with entry level clerical work experience went into training in either clerical or helping professions, which often translated into related, but often low paying, jobs. People with previous work experience in helping professions got training in those professions, which translated into full time, decent paying training-related jobs primarily for those with high school diplomas. Finally, the study found that employment in highly paid, blue collar jobs had no relationship to training (1997a, p. 16).

In access to training programs, a similar kind of hierarchy was found. African Americans enrolled primarily in mandatory job development and job specific skills programs. Whites and Asians were served by community college and tuition based programs while Latinos were left out of training for the most part (1997a, p. 6).

About the less than one quarter who had no real work history, the study concludes:

> First, while not having a high school diploma did not help in finding employment, the majority of people who did not finish high school in fact have worked (1997a, p. 32). The group which never worked seems to have in common family, neighborhood, or personal characteristics which lead them to be isolated from employment networks and to have other issues which keep them from working (1997c). Anthropological research on low income populations show that family ties often place women in a dense web of obligations to family and friends (Stack, 1974). Since work is often unavailable and unreliable, these kinship obligations become more important than work or school (Schneider, 1997a, p. 32).

Schneider further investigated the influence of circles of family, friends, neighbors and acquaintances (or the social networks of individuals) in her

research. She found that while 94% of the people in the study had been on public assistance, 87% had worked for wages as adults: "In many cases, the population working in low wage or even working class jobs is interchangeable with the population on welfare. Therefore, policy makers and program developers cannot assume that this population simply needs training for appropriate jobs and work experience" (1997a, p. 29). Schneider also notes:

> The dramatic differences in career and training paths across race and nationality and gender reveals that patterns of discrimination, as well as socialization towards certain kinds of employment, persists in the 1990s. Part of this is due to the extreme segregation of Philadelphia and the poor quality of its public schools. The fact that many of the people who had never worked or were in low end service jobs despite training had finished high school shows the quality of education for many low wage workers in Philadelphia (1997d, p. 10).

Part of the difference in training and career paths lies in social networks that are accessible to individuals of different class and race status. As Schneider observes: "Friends and family can only provide advice based on their won experience and world view." The confluence of networks constrained by race and class was poignantly illustrated by an African American who was the first in his family to graduate from college and who held a professional job for many years but was excluded from the white network of colleagues in his office. When he was let go as a result of downsizing, he had neither professional contacts nor a family who could provide leads to jobs in his field (1997c).

The most successful participants in Schneider's study were those who could combine clerical or professional work experience with a high school diploma or better, and with additional training and social networks that could provide contacts and support. In short, them that had some, got more; those with less, need more. But who is willing to recognize and provide the kind of extensive, expensive support necessary to make up for the social capital denied to the poor, single mothers, the uneducated, and people of color?

One successful model that does so is Project Match, in Chicago. Project Match serves the hardest to reach and employ among public assistance recipients. Its participants, drawn from the Cabrini Green housing project in Chicago, are 99% African American unmarried women, 60% of whom are under 25 at the point of enrollment. Only 55% have any work experience at all, and 58% come from homes supported by welfare. In response to these multiple barriers to

employment, Project Match has designed an individualized, human development approach to move individuals from welfare to work. They use as a model of this journey an Aincremental ladder,≅ which reflects the fact that progress is not linear, but may involve setbacks and many small steps forward. Project Match concentrates on the lower rungs of the ladder to work by offering individuals activities that help develop work-like behavior and by rewarding them as they go along. For example, an individual might be encouraged to get her child to school on time, then to volunteer in her child=s school and eventually and gradually to move to a regular volunteer assignment. She might be recognized in the local newsletter for her contribution. Project Match has no prescribed trajectory of education and work, but rather allows for the uneven ways in which people make decisions, commitments and progress. Other features of the program include the creation of Aproxy networks≅ that can assist with job searches and references, and intensive post placement follow-up, in recognition of initial job loss among the majority of participants. This approach has resulted in a 47% increase in employment and a 23% increase in wages among participants (Herr and Halpern, 1994; Olson et al., 1990).

In the first and only study to compare the monthly household budgets of welfare-reliant and wage reliant single mothers in four U.S. cities, sociologist Kathryn Edin and anthropologist Laura Lein (1997) successfully debunk theories that attribute poverty and welfare receipt to cultural attitudes and behavior. They examine predicted patterns of expenditures and strategies, based on culture of poverty theories, across differences of race, marital status, family background, neighborhood and whether a woman relied on welfare or her wages for support. They conclude:

> Our data do not tell a strong story of cultural forces shaping mothers' spending, survival strategies or hardship, though they do suggest some unexpected differences among groups. Foremost, mothers who received welfare, mothers who had never married, mothers who lived in poor neighborhoods and were from a minority group exhibited more frugal spending behavior than their more advantaged counterparts (213).

The authors state that the problem of welfare "dependency" is a labor market structural problem, not a problem of willingness on the part of individuals to work:

> The essence of the "welfare trap" is not that public aid warps women's personalities or makes them pathologically dependent. . .

> Rather, it is that low-wage jobs usually make single mothers even worse off than they were on welfare (87).

As the mothers in Edin and Lein's study put it, their problem is that, given the lack of affordable reliable child care and health care in this country, they must constantly choose between their roles as parents, on the one hand, and providers, on the other. Has any set of circumstances so laid bare the contradictions of gender in the United States as their predicament? Suddenly, how much we have relied on single mothers to do the impossible becomes the problem of service providers in communities and policy makers at the state level. The stark reality of the high cost of child care and the low wages paid to many workers raises questions that would be obvious to anyone not hypnotized by the media portrayal of joblessness as a failure of will. How is it that these women can be working full time jobs and not making enough to support their families? Why is it that wages are so low that many families are better off on public assistance than they are when working? Why do we provide health care only for the non-working and the aged? How can the belief that mothers should take care of children, at the root of the refusal to provide publicly supported quality child care, be reconciled with the demand that poor women work at wages too low to pay for private child care? Subsidized child care during a transition to work is helpful, but assumes that an entry level job will lead to opportunities for work with benefits and wages high enough to pay for child care. Perhaps at no other time in our recent history has this been less true. Jobs are increasingly precarious and, part-time, and the opportunity to rise in an industry or field seems to occur at the same educational level as does the likelihood of earning a wage that enables a single mother to meet her family's needs: the postsecondary level (Bos 1996; Grubb, 1992; 1995).

It is interesting that most mothers on welfare assess the relationship between education, training and employment in much the same way many researchers do. They have little faith in the kinds of publicly funded programs to which they are referred, most of which aim to place them in exactly the kinds of jobs they have had and from which they seek escape (see Merrifield, 1997 and Grubb, 1996 for data on the failure of such training programs). Nor do the vast majority need work readiness preparation. Rather, their aim is to enter and complete high quality two and four year training programs that prepare them for occupations that pay a living wage (Edin and Lein, 1997: 229). Moreover, Edin and Lein report that these realities were recognized and acted upon in one rural country in Minnesota. The local JOBS program recognized the short sightedness of most training, and only funded technical and community college programs that had a 60% placement rate. The result was that most mothers found work at $8 an hour or better (Zucker, quoted in Edin and Lein, 10997: 234). Similarly, David

Rosen reports that Wyoming's welfare caseload dropped 65% last year, which constituted the nation's biggest drop. Moreover, two-thirds of those leaving the rolls are actually getting jobs, in stark contrast to cities like New York (Hernandez, 1998; Finder, 1998). According to the Boston Globe article quoted by Rosen on the National Literacy Advocacy on-line discussion list created to provide a forum for policy issues in adult education, this is due to "a unique small town approach" where individuals are encouraged and helped to find jobs "at their own pace, with support instead of threats, flexible guidelines rather than rigid rules." Furthermore, Wyoming does not have workfare; rather, the state requires only that individuals are trying to find a job in order to keep their benefits until the five year limit. Plans for individuals may include job search, basic skills instruction, and a host of counseling and other support services. A final note: the ratio of caseworkers to clients in Wyoming is 1:14; according to Rosen, in Massachusetts it is 1:120. These success stories echo the reams of research done by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation on welfare to work strategies (see Gueron and Pauly, 1991: 34-5). High cost, high quality services cost government money in the short term but pave the way to higher incomes and job stability for public assistance recipients over the long term. But is anyone listening to these reports of "best practices?" Not now, because the criteria for success in welfare to work programs has shifted from lifting individuals out of poverty to reducing government expenditures, thus favoring low cost solutions least likely to reduce poverty or lead to employment at wages that can permanently sustain families.

As I outlined in my NIFL research, other nations resolve these issues differently than we do here in the US. They have education and training systems that prepare individuals for jobs at low or no cost, and they have mechanisms for ensuring that wages are commensurate with education and training (Freeman 1994). Examples of such mechanisms include variations on centralized collective bargaining in Sweden and Italy, and extensive training systems for workers that are tied to strong union representation in Germany and Japan. Given the power of "the market" in US political discourse, such mechanisms are unlikely to find acceptance here at any time in the near future. How then, can mothers who rely on public assistance or low wage jobs attain enough education to earn incomes that sustain families? Certainly, this is unlikely to happen in New York City, where education for public assistance recipients is discouraged, frustrated, and for all intents and purposes, forbidden, and where workfare policies have caused the number of welfare recipients pursuing higher education to drop by half, from 26,000 to 13,000 (Casey, 1998:14).

I will leave the discussion of the labor market for public assistance recipients to the economists, except to note that research has shown it to be segmented by race and gender (Holzer,1996; Lafer, 1992). Not only is there a political refusal to create jobs for public assistance recipients where there are not enough, but also affirmative action is in demise. Given the disproportionate numbers of people of color and women on public assistance, can anything but deepening poverty and inequality be the result? Where workfare workers are assigned to work in the public sector, there is evidence that they are displacing union workers with benefits (Greenhouse, 1998: A1). This completes the attempt to roll back all of the progress made by unions and by civil rights struggles, and to leave public assistance recipients and low wage workers defenseless in a labor market in which corporate interests and government policies combine to reduce wages, benefits, and job security.

Implications for Literacy Practice

These conditions, though external to literacy programs, affect learners and thus, literacy practices. Yet, as Fingeret tell us, although our field has amassed much descriptive research, experiential anecdotes, and how-to-manuals, we have not explored some of the underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs about literacy and the relationship between it and other social problems (quoted in Quigley, 1997:93). However, although "we can-and usually do-refrain from asking philosophical questions . . .we cannot avoid acting according to philosophical assumptions (Blakely, quoted in Quigley, 1997:93).≡ And our practice can suffer as a result.

How? Work by Gowen (1990; 1992) and Gowen and Bartlett (1997) link popular discourse to classroom practice, by considering how the attempts of educators to create contextualized literacy programs in the workplace, and even to adopt critical pedagogy in the classroom, are limited if they do not first understand the role of literacy in the lives of learners, the class, race and gender realities of learners' lives, and the conflicting interests of workers and employers. Gowen's work exposes the effect of erroneous assumptions about what workers know, what they need to know, what bosses and supervisors think they know, and how well meaning literacy instructors think they should learn. In so doing, she shows us that the people who end up in our literacy programs not only occupy very different positions in the class, race and gender hierarchy than their employers, teachers, and others who make decisions about them, but also that this means they have different ideas, goals, reasons for learning, and economic and political interests.

In Gowen's ethnography of a hospital workplace literacy class (1992), workers resisted the contextualization of literacy by objecting to content related to tasks that in their opinion, they had already mastered. In particular, the use of "Weekly Tips" memos from supervisors was resented. As one worker put it: "I've been at King Memorial for 23 years, and I feel like if I don't know how to clean now, I will not learn . . . That's not going to help me get my GED I don't think (Gowen, 1990, p. 261)." This comment highlights the different goals for workplace literacy that management and workers held, and the opposing views of worker competency and its relationship to literacy that existed. Gowen situates the resistance of workers to this kind of class in the social relations between labor and management at the hospital, as well as in the history of race relations in the region.

In another article about the domestic abuse experienced by learners in a literacy program, Gowen and Bartlett provide this sobering lesson:

> Adult educators must realize that women abuse survivors are likely to be participants in worker education programs, especially those designed for front line, hourly-wage earning, low skill workers. This is specifically because the two factors that put women at the risk of violence are low education and low wages—the very segment of the workforce that is described as most in need of additional training. . . .And when women gain the education and skills to break out of abusive situations, they are likely to experience escalated forms of abuse, derision, or even death. For these reasons, working with women survivors requires special skill, sensitivity, and an awareness of the sometimes fatal consequences of empowerment (1997, p. 150).

The authors go on to recount the frustration of a literacy teacher, who in her attempt to use participatory pedagogy encountered the resistance of women for whom silence was armor. They do not argue against this pedagogy, but rather situate it within the perspective of poor, abused women, and learn from this how to adapt instructional methodology for these learners. As in Gowen's previous work on women hospital workers, Gowen and Bartlett show how the assumptions of educators, policy makers, and employers differ from those of learners in ways that reflect the realities of race, class and gender and prevent effective teaching and learning in literacy programs:

> What we must conclude from our experiences is that while collaborative and critical approaches to literacy education might be

> quite appropriate for many women, they might not provide a good starting point for women who have been silenced by violence and abuse and whose goals are circumscribed by secrets that "take up all the space (1997, p. 153).

We cannot ignore the fundamental factors that constrain students' lives—the things they know and feel and live every day—and expect them to participate in literacy practice as we define it. Nor can we organize curricula as if learners' interests are perfectly aligned with those of funders, employers, and policy makers.

Assessment and evaluation also bear the effects of our failure to fully contextualize the lives of learners. Union educators have pointed out that the assumption underlying much of workplace literacy is that workers and management have the same interests in education. Certainly, some interests are shared, but others aren't. More importantly, educational programs that direct learners toward participating in and measuring up to existing standards, understanding existing systems, and complying with organizational goals usually leave out avenues for conceptualizing, supporting, and making change. What the work of anthropologists shows is that the population in our programs needs not only literacy but also an expansion of existing opportunities for both work and education. We and our students need to understand not only how education affects work, but also how racism and sexism, and the social capital that comes with class status, determine which jobs are available to whom.

Writing other Stories: The Role of Adult Educators in Welfare Reform

My purpose in writing the above depressing pages is neither to make us despair about our role as educators nor to destroy our agency in making change by showing the depth of change that's needed. We will despair only if we accept that the primary role of educators is to prepare individuals for the kinds of jobs that are currently available to them.

As adult educators face policy, practice and research issues within a context of welfare reform, clarity about the relationship of education to getting and keeping a job is either assumed or outside the bounds of debate. Yet, false assumptions about this relationship result in conflict and contradictions among research findings, policy stands, and programmatic decisions. For example, research shows that there are many factors other than education that account for an individual=s employment. However, despite this, programs are evaluated at least in part on job placement. As a result, curriculum becomes job-driven, as if having

the perfect résumé and the right attitude is all it takes to get a job, and as if this is the primary subject matter of adult education. This disjuncture between the many faceted reality of employment and policy assumptions makes adult education appear a dismal failure; if our purpose is to get people jobs and we are not doing that, we do not deserve funding. Thus, adult education is marginalized in welfare to work policy and funding, and the field occupies an ambiguous status: between K-12 and higher education, and a poor second to "Work First" in state welfare reform plans. Our historic lack of success in advocating for ourselves and our learners is underscored by the conclusions drawn from research looking at the role of adult education in welfare to work initiatives. These imply that, despite the undisputed association of higher levels of literacy and education with higher wages and higher levels of employment, there is no evidence that participation in a literacy program helps individuals get jobs (D'Amico, 1997: iii). While the issue of assessment and outcomes in adult education is important and in part responsible for our inability to demonstrate the accomplishments of our programs and our learners, this cannot be the reason we are excluded from current welfare reform initiatives. I say this because these initiatives do include workfare and employer incentives, policies lacking any evidence of their effectiveness (on workfare, see Leon, 1995; Finder, 1998; on employer subsidies see Offner, 1997). In short, political will is lacking for the level of educational investment, ancillary services, and income and employment policies that research shows are necessary to move the poor into stable jobs.

The underlying tangle of contradictions that abound in the literature I reviewed for my NIFL report on adult education and welfare reform (1998) derive from the policy assumption that individuals need education and training to prepare for the existing job market. This assumption, from which most of our funding proceeds, leaves out the class, race and gender dynamics of the labor market, as well as questions about the availability of jobs, what they pay, how long they last, where they lead, and whether or not an individual hired for them can afford health and child care. Yet, these are precisely the conditions our learners face in the job market, and we and they have the tales to tell that illustrate the cost of the assumption that what matters is not these factors, but only their willingness to work and their education or literacy level. Certainly, the latter is part of the picture of who does what and for what wages, but access to education is increasingly restricted by the same barriers of class, race and gender as is the job market. I have had the opportunity to speak based on my NIFL research in a number of different settings, and I find that many educators are caught between the experience of their participants and the assumptions of policy.

Because of the association between literacy and work, we proudly claim the success stories of learners who get and keep jobs as our own. Seeing literacy as part of a web of factors that influence the ability of individuals to support families by working is not the same as assessing literacy programs by their ability to place individuals in jobs. Yet, as Rich points out, the purpose of education is increasingly defined as quick job placement, obscuring the difference between education and training (1997). Indeed, I found this to be so even in some of the exemplary studies cited above. The Schneider study, for example, referred to GED preparation as GED training, and at times this prevented me from sorting out differences in effect from education and training in the article. Rich, a curriculum and staff developer at the New York City Department of Employment, examines the differences in definitions and practice between education and training. Prominent in the text of the article are the Webster New World Dictionary definitions of educate and train:

> Train: to instruct so as to make proficient or qualified or to condition (as a child or puppy) to perform bodily functions in appropriate places.
>
> Educate: To develop the knowledge, skills, mind or character of; to teach or instruct, to form or develop.

While there is some overlap in these definitions, the connotations are clear. What is interesting is the association of education with the human mind or character, and of training with the routine and the animal. Arguing, as we all do, that jobs of today are more likely to require the kinds of broad abilities that education develops, such as the SCANS skills or the role maps of Equipped For the Future, Rich suggests that contextualized, learner centered education is preferable to training. She supports her position with a quote from the report of the New York Alliance of educators and trainers, entitled Looking at Literacy, Indicators of Program Quality:

> The overarching goal of a quality literacy program is to help learners become more competent readers, writers, speakers and problem solvers in the contexts of their personal and family lives, the community and the workplaces. This can best be accomplished with effective teachers, who provide a respectful and supportive environment for learning, have high expectations for their students and require them to engage in analysis, investigation and interpretation (New York Alliance, quoted in Rich, 1997, p. 30).

However, in such talk about contextualized literacy, we often leave out much of the context that affects the ability of learners to access jobs and education. We talk about the impact of adult education on learners at work, in families and in communities, assuming the only thing necessary is for them to perform better in these arenas of life. Yet, we work with learners affected negatively by the class, race and gender dimensions of access to good jobs, day care, health care, housing, and community resources. For example, when learners and others on public assistance have difficulty getting and keeping jobs because the babysitter quits or their child becomes ill, do they know that they live in the only major industrialized nation without public child care and some form of national health insurance? Is our education giving learners the information, and the analytic and literacy strategies to make changes in the conditions that govern access to employment?

I was just barely fortunate enough to be steered toward college while in high school, and lucky enough to come of age when the struggle for equal opportunity afforded me a college education, tuition free, at City University of New York. My CUNY education, to the doctorate level, has stood me in good stead both in terms of doing exciting, challenging work and in asking critical questions about the value of that work and about the political and economic context in which it is done. I would like the same for literacy students. Why must liberating education, in their case, be opposed to education for jobs? According to Grubb, narrowly focused training programs for the poor have failed miserably, and training needs to become more learner centered and participatory, more like education, rather than the other way around (1996).

In an ERIC Digest position paper entitled *Work Force Education or Literacy Development: Which Road Should Adult Education Take?*, Susan Imel notes:

> In the current context, adult educators may feel caught in the middle. If they want to be participants in the policy discussions at the state level and partners at the local level in providing educational services to the broad spectrum of work force development customers, they may be excluded by funders if their programs cannot meet the goals of work force development. How can they defend the need for their programs to have broader goals yet still meet the needs of funders? (1998)

I would argue that the answer lies in how you define *workforce* development appropriate for a country with democratic values, as opposed to the *forced work* that characterizes welfare to work policy. The latter is about literacy that prepares

workers to take any job (Gordon, 1995), while the former can and should include social policy and funding directed toward allowing workers opportunities and choices regarding access to education and jobs. Literacy education directed toward a future that includes more than entry level, low paying, unstable jobs is necessary for workforce development of this kind.

With this definition in mind, I think of the exemplary work of Susan Cowles and the TANF recipients at the Oregon community college program at which she works, with its field trips on the Internet and virtual conversations with scientists in Antarctica. Cowles simultaneously develops scientific literacy, technological literacy, basic literacy, and the kinds of skills needed in the best of workplaces, where the ideas and opinions of workers are sought and valued. Her program is not characterized by work readiness content only, but by the broad goals and practices that support understanding the world and one=s place in it, and becoming an empowered reader, writer and thinker. I think of the Community Women's Education Project in Philadelphia, whose explicitly Frierian and feminist practice supports both critical pedagogy and the employment aspirations of learners. The CWEP has managed to straddle the political divide between their own world view and that of welfare policy, and has worked successfully with their local Private Industry Council, whom they convinced to support two year community college programs for interested public assistance recipients (Quint and DiMeo, 1998). Again, their triumph is that they have been able to win for participants the opportunity to be truly and broadly educated, in ways that serve the ends of employment and family self-sufficiency. I think also of the Stanley Isaacs Neighborhood Center in New York, and the work of Ira Yankwitt and Charlotte Marchant, who teach political literacy, develop curriculum that supports critical analysis of welfare issues and attempt, with their students, to educate legislators on literacy and welfare concerns. Their students learn to read the word and the world, as they take their words to local and state officials and advocate on their own behalf. In the process, they learn how our political system works and how to organize ideas for effective presentation. I think about Paul Jurmo, a nationally known adult education practitioner and scholar, arguing tirelessly for education for incumbent workers, a necessity if those who get or have jobs are ever to also have opportunity and choice in their work lives. Such education enables workers to move beyond entry level work into more stable and higher paying jobs in which they can truly use their new skills and knowledge.

Policy Issues: Allies and Advocacy

What does it mean to have this kind of liberating vision for education, particularly for education of the poor and the unemployed? It means acknowledging the

dissonance between the interests of employers and workers, between the objectives of funding and the purposes of learners, and between education as a human right, and education as a form of job training. It means providing the intellectual tools to have choices about one's own survival and success strategies as well as to choose political positions and to act on them. It may mean building alliances with organizations who share the broad mission of literacy, and who are working to help create conditions that challenge the fundamental inequalities in access to education and jobs that mark adult learners' lives.

When I worked at the Consortium for Worker Education, I developed, with union education directors, some staff development material for teachers interested in teaching workers about welfare reform issues from the critical stance of how these issues affect the struggles of the working class. This was one activity through which we attempted to build alliances between literacy providers opposed to aspects of welfare reform and unions whose interests were also affected. Literacy workers and students also attended the large rally of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) in New York, during the town meetings conducted by the Sweeny leadership, and the Central Labor Council, along with churches and other concerned groups, held a forum on education and welfare reform where participants in education programs spoke about their workfare experiences. Although these alliances are episodic and in their infancy, I believe they are an important direction for literacy providers concerned with the real welfare of their students. Labor unions, whatever their flaws and past failings, constitute an important avenue for dealing with the concerns of low wage workers, and with the consequences of workfare for wages and employment locally and nationally. Further evidence for this lies in the strong campaign being waged by New York City unions for expansion of quality public day care programs, and, among some unions, in the attempts to organize workfare workers.

From Philadelphia comes another example of strategic alliances. Ed Schwartz is not a literacy provider but someone who stumbled upon literacy in his efforts to form a citywide coalition to address issues of welfare reform, including housing, jobs, and community impact. He has become a strong advocate for literacy, simply by looking at the statistics on literacy and work on the one hand and at the labor market in the city on the other, and drawing the obvious and ominous

conclusions. His organization, the Institute for Civic Values, has organized a coalition of neighborhood organizations, human service agencies, business associations and unions to fight for jobs, education, and training in the interests of neighborhood revitalization in Philadelphia. The coalition has agreed to work for five broad goals, one of which is: "Lifelong learning, through school reform, adult literacy, job training and community education." At the New Jersey Association for Lifelong Learning, Schwartz said he was motivated to form the coalition because he fears the dire consequences of welfare reform for individuals and communities. To those who would call him an alarmist, he recounts how his predictions about the epidemic rise in homelessness as a result of the changed housing policies of the 80s have all come to pass.

As practitioners privileged to know some of our students' real stories, we have the personal responsibility to create forums where they can articulate them, and to tell them ourselves in places to which our learners do not yet have entry. Secondly, we need to understand the class, race, and gender context of welfare reform, how it is understood, and what it means for our practice. Thirdly, we need to decide on policies that will more effectively represent the needs of learners and of educators and connect with allies who are likely to share our interests.

To do these things, we need to stop and think about how we write about and act on adult literacy issues in an era of welfare reform. We particularly need to consider what it means to implement policies that see job placement as a necessary outcome of education, or those that put practitioners in the position of conforming to legislation with which they are in fundamental disagreement. Our dilemma is whether we can save and enhance programs under current conditions while we continue to argue for education as a fundamental right of adults. If not, we become "literacy trainers, " complicit in the belief that the primary purpose of education is to prepare individuals for any job they can get.

Once we recognize the many factors involved in employment for low literate individuals on public assistance, it becomes clear that we cannot argue effectively for increased recognition and funding of adult education by ourselves. We need to join forces with other advocates and with activists among public assistance recipients, along the lines of the Philadelphia model cited above. Our voices are stronger if we raise them in support of adequate child care, transportation, wages, and health care with proponents of these issues that are so wedded to ours and to the needs of adult learners. In this way, the passage of the Personal Responsibility Act can be a catalyst for forming coalitions and partnerships that benefit our work, and adult education can be part of a broad social movement that seeks to increase access to self sufficiency and opportunity along lines of class,

gender and race. At the same time, however, we must also concentrate on providing the best educational support possible, within Workforce Investment funding guidelines, to TANF recipients fighting the five year clock. If learners on public assistance can resolutely continue to seek education, even as they face issues of homelessness and survival for themselves and their children, then we in adult education can surely speak to both their imminent practical concerns *and* their long term development and political empowerment.

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